KAHTLIAN

A CHIEF OF THE RAVEN TRIBE

KAHTLIAN'S WAR BONNET

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A CENTURY and a half ago Russia, through its fur trade, had begun to occupy the great land of Alaska. The natives were enslaved or driven from their homes, and were made subject to harsh laws, with death as a penalty for disobedience. No wonder that wrath against their oppressors filled their hearts. Their only thought was revenge; their one aim, to injure the Russians.

A native chief, the first Kahtlian, thirsting for vengeance, set about carving his war bonnet of red cedar-wood. This was a singular headdress, ten or fifteen pounds in weight, and in form representing the emblem of Kahtlian's clan—a raven's head, with beak extended and open, to hold a strip of red blanket that to the warrior signified the life blood of his enemies.

Through courage and strategy the chief and his followers were victorious, and the field was left in the hands of the natives. But their stores were destroyed, and soon they were in danger of starving. As they traveled over the mountains, searching for food, to the women was given the charge of the great war hat. "If they could carry their little ones and the hat, all was well; but if one must be sacrificed, it must be the child."

In March, 1867, Alaska came into the possession of the United States by purchase. When Dr. Sheldon Jackson went to Alaska in 1877, the old hat, which had been pre-

served through three generations, was in the possession of the present Sitka chief, Kahtlian the third. The soldiery, which formed the sole representative of United States authority, had been withdrawn. The natives, therefore, supposed that the land had been given up by the Government, and Kahtlian organized a party to massacre the American traders who were left behind. Fortunately, word reached Victoria, B. C., of danger, and at the request of

AN ALASKAN CANOE

the citizens of Sitka, a British gunboat was sent for their protection. From that time, however, Kahtlian was the leading native, noted for his opposition to American control and the Christian religion.

Kahtlian's whole life had been one of heathenism and cruelty. So opposed was he to the work of the missionaries that Mr. Austin, who was the pastor of the native church for many years and beloved by all the natives, often sought to reach him, but in vain.

He finally joined the Russian Church, so that they would

cease to trouble him. As the natives came more and more under the influence of God's Spirit, they organized and maintained prayer meetings among themselves, led by Mrs. Paul and other mission workers. They secured permission to hold them at the homes often of those who had not yet come under the influence of the Truth.

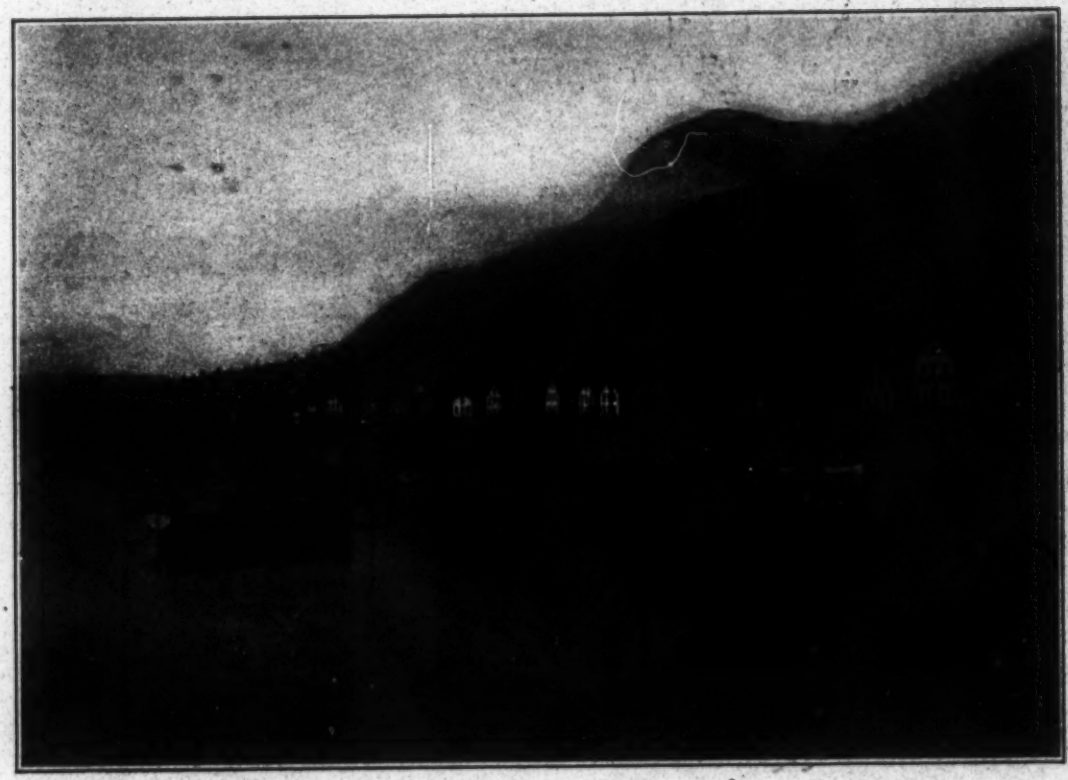
Kahtlian, although he allowed them to meet in his house, as soon as the meeting was broken up and the people had left the house would light his candle, which was placed in front of the picture of the patron saint of the Greek Church, go through his devotions, and try to drive out the influence that he feared the prayer meeting might have exerted. The patience of the Christian workers, and the faithfulness of the native Christians, however, finally overcame his opposition.

During the winter of 1900 he began attending the mission church, and, yielding to the claims of Christ, he asked for baptism and admission to church membership.

The great burden of his heart was for the conversion of his family and relatives. He would speak, with tears, of his seven sisters living in a village seventy miles distant, who, with their families, were still in heathenism with no missionary within their reach. It was suggested to him that he should go himself to the village and tell his relatives of the change that had come into his heart, which would have greater force with them than the teachings of any missionary.

His life has, indeed, been changed, and for several years he has been a faithful witness to the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For some time after his conversion, Kahtlian, as head chief of his clan, kept the old raven hat. At last, how-



KAHTLIAN'S HOME IN NATIVE VILLAGE, SITKA

ever, he came with it to the office of the Superintendent of the Training School at Sitka. Holding the hat in his hand, the old man told to the missionaries the story of those early days of warfare. As he came down to the scenes of his own conflicts his form straightened, his eyes flashed, he was again the warrior. But as the tale neared its close his aspect changed. With tears starting from his eyes, he held out the hat to the missionaries, saying, "Now take, my brothers; I have tried to be a Christian and keep these things, but I cannot do it. I could sell this for a hundred fifty dollars, but I don't want the money. Take it, destroy it, put it in the Museum, anything you like. As I give you this hat, I give up my past life, my old superstitions and my sins, all my envy, strife, malice, witchcraft and all selfishness, and take the American flag for my emblem and the Lord Jesus Christ as my Guide and Saviour."*

No greater example of the power of the Holy Spirit in subduing the fierce nature of a native Alaskan can be found. As he stands up in the prayer meeting, in the church which he now loves so well, and gives his testimony or offers prayer, his face, so stern in repose, is like unto the face of an angel. Listen as he tells of God's patience and love:

"When we were heathen and had slaves they went willingly to be slain when a chief die; so Jesus, He did not say anything when they nailed Him to the cross. I want to be like Jesus, be willing to bear my cross and not say a word."

Surely, for a chief who was so bitter and sinful to become a humble Christian is a miracle of grace.

But not in words alone has Kahtlian borne witness to the grace of God. He has withstood again and again that

* This hat has been placed in the Sheldon Jackson Museum at Sitka, where it may be seen by tourists.

great temptation to an Alaskan—the influence of the old heathen customs.

During a native feast held in Sitka in 1901, when he was tempted to yield to the entreaties of his friends, he fled from the native village and walked the beach in front of the mission, spending the night in prayer. His prayers were heard, and he realized the blessed assurance of the gospel words, "Lo, I am with you alway!"

In 1904 there was great excitement over the grand potlach, or native feast, to be held in November, when for several weeks the native village would be full of people feasting by day and dancing by night. These old custom feasts are anything but elevating in their influence. The Governor and missionaries, as in many former years, used every effort to persuade the natives to give up the potlach; but the Alaskans insisted that they must give one more. their honor and caste was at stake.

Six prominent native Christians, representing as many tribes, led by Kahtlian, appealed to the Governor to forbid the potlach. But, as there was no law against it, this was impossible; and the men were at last made to understand that though the Governor must enforce, he could not enact law.

The invitations to the potlach had been sent out early in the fall, and for many months great preparations were made for the visit of the neighboring tribes to Sitka. Winds and waves seemed to be against their coming, and many accidents occurred which might have dampened the ardor of any but a native-born seaman. Finally, word was received that several canoes were coming from Killisnoo, the nearest town, seventy-five miles distant.

However, the Yakutat people arrived first, followed soon after by those from other villages.

About ten o'clock on November twenty-third several canoe loads of people arrived at Japansky, one of the islands across the bay from Sitka.

On the morning of the twenty-fifth messengers from the Sitka tribe were sent to the island, to learn when the visitors might be expected; then they returned to dress for the reception. In a short time the guests arrived. There were fourteen canoes lashed side by side each filled with men, women and children from the Killisnoo tribe. In the bow of each stood a chief dressed in his dancing costume, and holding an American flag. They came on slowly. When near the shore they stopped and chanted some of their weird songs. At the conclusion, members of the Sitka tribe appeared on the beach, dressed in gorgeous array, and welcomed their guests. A chant was sung, followed by a native dance. Imagine, if you can, fifty natives, faces daubed with red and black paint, rings in ears and noses, decked out in feathers and beads, skins of animals and human scalps, etc., dancing on the beach, while the guests sat in solemn silence in the canoes.

After the usual ceremonies, one of the chief men of the Yaksutte tribe, who was lying upon the beach, sprang up, throwing off the ropes with which he had been tied, thus showing the great strength of the hosts, and extended a welcome to the visiting tribe. When the other tribes arrived the same ceremonies were repeated.

The dancing took place in the house of Woosh-kee-na, who, with his brother, Yark-korn, and Chief Anna Hootz,

were the hosts. A new house had been erected for the occasion.

The men of one tribe, the Chilkat, wore the famous Chilkat blankets which are woven from the wool of the mountain goat, totemic in design. Their methods are so primitive that it takes many weeks to weave one blanket.

You can imagine the slow process of this wondrous art, when you learn that their fingers are their carding machines, and their hands their spinning wheel. When the totemic designs in the body of the artistic fabric are completed, twine made of the inner bark of the yellow cedar is woven into the long fringe, to give it stability. The price of a genuine blanket ranges from seventy-five to one hundred and fifty dollars, and only persons of rank are ever permitted to appear in these sacred garments. On their heads these men wore their dancing hats, made of carved wood beautifully inlaid with an abalone shell, and trimmed with seal whiskers set in the crown. The center is well supplied with birds' down, and when the wearer dances. the secretly stored downy feathers fall over his shoulders like great flakes of snow.

A CHIEF'S SON

The pendant trimmings were of white ermine skins—often as many as forty or fifty of these beautiful skins were

attached to one headdress. Members of other tribes wore deerskin suits elaborately embroidered with beads, buttons, etc.

Unlike the modern dance, that of the H'lingit people is performed by a single person and is a muscle dance.

A low, droning chant by the women of the tribe taking part, accompanied by the pounding of the tambourine-

ALASKANS TAKE TO PADDLES FROM EARLIEST CHILDHOOD

shaped drum, commences, while the dancers keep time by stamping with one foot on the floor. Each man enters the room backwards, while he slowly turns, keeping time with the music. As the dance proceeds, the chant becomes louder and faster, and the stamping gives place to a series of contortions and gestures which can not be described.

Each dance lasts about twenty minutes. This is kept up

for several hours, as the different tribes take part. In connection with the dance is the feast, giving away of food, money and blankets. The latter are torn in strips and given to various persons; these pieces are sewn together and made into coats called potlach coats, of which the wearers are very proud.

The Superintendent of the Mission had offered Kahtlian a room where he might take refuge from the persecutions of his friends while the feast was in progress. But the noble old man replied: "Do not fear for me; my God is a present help in trouble; therefore I will not fear."

Is it any wonder that during the six weeks of this great feast, when nearly five hundred natives from neighboring villages made the nights hideous with their orgies, this man Kahtlian, strong in the strength of the Lord, stood firm, and in his official position, that of a native policeman, prevented many scenes which might have ended in bloodshed or murder?

And this was the last potlach ever to be held in Sitka! A paper to this effect was drawn up the following January, and signed by the chief men of the Sitka tribe, in the presence of representatives of the United States Government.

Just one more incident concerning this brave old man: One of the missionaries being obliged to leave the work at Sitka went to the native village to bid farewell to some of the Christians. When she called at Kahtlian's house, his wife being absent, he said: "We come see you." On Wednesday evening, after the prayer meeting, they went to her room, bringing one of the mission girls to interpret for them. They expressed much sorrow in that she must leave because of ill health, and sent messages to Mr. Austin, their

former pastor. "Tell him," said Kahtlian, "we always pray for him, we never forget him."

"I hope you will pray for me also," said the missionary. "Oh," said he, "we always pray for the teachers, they tell us all we know about Jesus Christ who was so patient with me when I sin so many years, who died on the cross for us; we never forget them."

As they knelt in prayer, each one prayed most earnestly, and the teacher who was to leave them the next day felt that she was greatly honored in that these faithful native Christians were her friends and were daily remembering her with others at the Throne of Grace.

Out of great tribulation, miraculously converted, Kahtlian, the chief, has become a humble follower of our Lord and Saviour, and by his faithful, earnest life is leading others into the kingdom of God.

"He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go out thence no more; and I will write upon him the name of my God—and mine own new name."

LYDIA ALEXANDER HAYS.

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